

CALIFORNIA HIGH-SPEED TRAIN

Project Environmental Impact Report /
Environmental Impact Statement

FINAL Public Participation Plan

for the

San Jose to Merced
High-Speed Train
Project EIR/EIS

October 2009

Prepared for:

**California High-Speed
Rail Authority**



**U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Railroad Administration**



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and
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U.S. Department
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INTRODUCTION

In 2005, the California High-Speed Rail Authority (Authority) and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) completed a Final Statewide Program Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) as the first-phase of a tiered environmental review process for the proposed California High-Speed Train (HST) system. The Authority and the FRA completed a second program EIR/EIS in July 2008 to identify a preferred alignment for the Bay Area to Central Valley section of the HST system. The Bay Area to Central Valley HST Program EIR/EIS identified a preferred alignment following the Caltrain rail right-of-way, between San Francisco and San Jose along the San Francisco Peninsula, through the Pacheco Pass and via Henry Miller Road, between San Jose and the Central Valley. Tiering from the two program studies, the Authority and the FRA will prepare a project EIR/EIS for the San Jose to Merced section of the HST. The San Jose to Merced section HST project EIR/EIS will examine site-specific impacts of the preferred alignment, station locations, and HST operations between San Jose and Merced, and will identify specific mitigation measures as necessary.

The Authority encourages broad public participation during the EIR/EIS process. This plan summarizes key strategies, methods and tools to reach and engage the public during environmental review. To avoid duplication of effort and to present a unified and consistent approach, the San Jose to Merced team will coordinate with the San Francisco to San Jose team regarding outreach in San Jose and with the Bakersfield to Merced team regarding outreach in Chowchilla and other communities in Merced and Madera counties.

ISSUES

Following are some of the key issues and interests raised during consultation with stakeholders and public scoping. The HST project team has drawn on this input to help shape proposed public participation strategies and activities and will continue to gather and assess public input and make refinements to outreach efforts as the study proceeds.

- Need for comprehensive public outreach in English and Spanish to fully engage community members adjacent to the proposed project
- Interest in how the HST project will connect with/support other transportation systems and plans
- Concern about potential noise, vibration, visual, safety, property value, and overall quality of life impacts of operation and construction of the proposed project in/near residential and commercial areas in locations throughout the entire corridor
- Concern about potential impacts to wetlands, biological resources, parks and open space in/near Coyote Point south of San Jose and the Grasslands Ecological Area, among others.
- Concern about the potential severance of access to property and the potential impacts of a real or perceived barrier created by the HST system

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOALS

The goals of the public participation are to:

- Engage a broad, representative cross section of the public to help ensure the project EIR/EIS reflects and incorporates agency and public input
- Identify and address public interests and issues to help shape and refine project alternatives
- Provide clear and accurate information that encourages informed public participation and input
- Provide multiple, convenient ways for interested parties to provide comment
- Provide multiple means through which the public can participate in and learn about the study
- Help communicate the vision, purpose and benefits of a high-speed train in California
- Accurately document public input and meet all CEQA and NEPA requirements

AUDIENCES

Below is a partial list of the diverse audiences that have provided input or are likely to be interested in or affected by the project and possible strategies to engage them during environmental review. The project mailing list includes many more. The team is continuing to seek input from these audiences on preferred ways to reach and involve their members and constituents.

Audience	Key Engagement Strategies
Resource agencies (see Agency Coordination Plan in Appendix A for more details)	Technical working group meetings
Local & transportation agencies (see Agency Coordination Plan in Appendix A for more details)	Individual meetings and consultation Technical working group meetings
Local elected officials San Jose (District 2 & 6 Council Members) Morgan Hill Gilroy Los Banos Chowchilla Merced	Periodic briefings at council meetings and through each jurisdiction's staff
Environmental/preservation stakeholders Committee for Green Foothills Sierra Club Greenbelt Alliance Nature Conservancy Historic preservation groups	Individual meetings and consultation Periodic group briefings E-mail/newsletter updates
Farm/agricultural stakeholders Madera, Merced, San Benito and Santa Clara County Farm Bureaus San Benito County Cattlemen's Association	Briefings and meetings E-mail/newsletter updates
<u>Adjacent Communities</u> <u>Santa Clara Co Communities</u> San Jose, including various neighborhood associations San Martin Morgan Hill, including Morgan Hill Chamber of Commerce and Morgan Hill Downtown Association Gilroy, including Gilroy Chamber of Commerce and Gilroy Downtown Business Association <u>Madera/Merced/Fresno County Communities</u> Los Banos, including Los Banos Chamber of Commerce Merced, including County Chamber of Commerce Santa Nella, including Santa Nella Chamber of Commerce Volta, including Volta Unified School District Chowchilla, including the Chowchilla Chamber of Commerce and other organizations Fresno, Madera, Atwater, Merced, Turlock	Briefings at regularly scheduled meetings Community meetings and workshops at milestone points E-mail/newsletter updates Web site updates Media and articles and notices in local, neighborhood and interest group blogs and publications
Property owners	Engagement through public meetings, briefings and other info materials to public

STRATEGIES AND APPROACH

The overall approach is to inform and update the public throughout the environmental review.

Public and agency outreach will be conducted in a manner that meets California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)/Federal Railroad Administration requirements (NEPA indicates public participation should be conducted per the lead agencies requirements). This includes:

- Public notice of the intent to prepare an environmental document
- Public comment period for scoping, including public scoping meetings
- Notice of the availability of the draft environmental document
- Public comment period on the draft document, including public meetings
- Provisions to make available response to comments
- Public hearing for certification of the document (CEQA)
- Notice of the Determination and Record of Decision

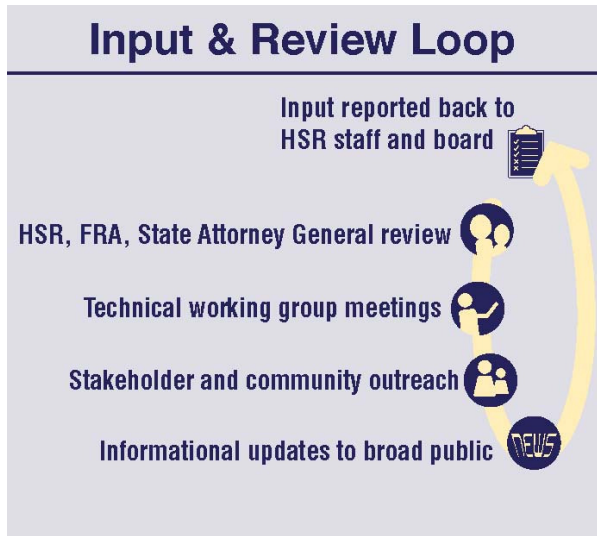
In addition, efforts will be made to meet the expectations for public and agency outreach and participation among key jurisdictions and communities in the project area that have provided input on preferred outreach methods and tools. Expanded agency and public outreach beyond CEQA/NEPA requirements includes:

- Agency and stakeholder briefings and presentations
- Technical working groups
- Community meetings on station design
- Newsletters, web site updates, and other media outreach

Overall, efforts will be made to inform and actively engage parties at milestone points to educate and solicit input on:

- Project definition/alternatives analysis
 - Scoping
 - Range of possible alternatives
 - Alternatives analysis
- Preliminary engineering
- Station design and planning
- EIR/EIS analysis
 - Impact assessment methodologies and criteria
- Draft & Final EIR/EIS

Generally, review and outreach “loops” will be conducted at points during the environmental review. At major milestones such as scoping, release of the alternatives analysis report, and review of the draft document, there will be extensive outreach to agencies and the broad public. At these milestones the outreach/review loop will start with a review by the High-Speed Train Project Management Team, concurrence from Authority and FRA staff, followed by a series of technical working group meeting with agencies, and then broadening to outreach through briefings and other means to community and interest group stakeholders, and then distribution of informational updates to the entire project contact list. At other points between major milestones, the outreach/review loop will not be as broad and will focus on agency input through technical working groups. Input from each loop will be summarized and reported back to the Authority staff and board.



Below is a summary of the core activities and tools proposed to inform and engage stakeholders and the general public. **Figure 1** provides a graphical representation of proposed activities by project phase.

Language Translation

Per the High Speed Rail Authority's guidance for multi-lingual outreach, information will be provided in other languages. Given the high number of Spanish speakers in portions of the project area, project newsletters and meeting notices will include information in both English and Spanish with a note in Chinese and Vietnamese directing speakers of those languages to the web site or the project information line for copies of newsletters and

notices in Chinese or Vietnamese.

HST-organized public meetings in areas with a high number of Spanish speakers will be conducted in English and Spanish with provisions made, as requested, for Chinese and Vietnamese interpretation. A project information line will allow callers to leave messages in those languages for project representatives to check, log, and return.

ACTIVITIES

AGENCY OUTREACH

As detailed in the Agency Coordination Plan in Appendix A, the HSR and environmental review team have identified and will be interacting with cooperating, participating, and responsible agencies, that include a mix of federal, state, regional and local resource, transportation, and community agencies. Involvement will occur through individual consultation, correspondence, briefings, and technical working groups as outlined below.

Technical Working Groups

The team proposes to conduct a series of meetings with three technical working group meetings at milestone points to update and seek input from agencies. One group will include resources agencies from throughout the project area, a second will include city, county and transportation agency representatives in Santa Clara and San Benito counties and a third will include city, county and transportation agency representatives from Madera, Merced and potentially Fresno counties.

Unique to this section is an existing relationship between local agencies, which routinely coordinate on local planning efforts. Additionally, due to the rural conditions of the area, there are fewer agencies than perhaps in other sections of the HST system. To maximize efforts and build on the relationships currently in place, the San Jose to Merced section is combining city, county and transportation agencies into one set of the technical working groups.

Below are the proposed topics and schedules for meetings with each of the groups.

Technical Working Group Focus	Anticipated Schedule (Subject to Change)
Workshop Series # 1. Scoping report, purpose and need, range of alternatives	September 2009
Workshop Series #2. Draft Alternatives analysis report	November 2009
Workshop Series #3. Station concepts	March 2010
Workshop Series #4. Preliminary Engineering	June 2010
Workshop Series #5. General update	September 2010
Workshop Series #6. Technical Reports	December 2010
Workshop Series #7. Draft EIR/EIS	May/June 2011
Workshop Series #8. Locally Preferred Alternative	September 2011
Workshop Series #9. Final EIR/EIS	January 2012

Stakeholder and Community Outreach

As a first step prior to scoping, the environmental team identified and met with a mix of agency, local community, environmental and other stakeholders for early input on issues and interests to consider and preferred ways of informing and involving them throughout the study. Since then, a more comprehensive list of environmental, historic preservation, business, community/neighborhood interests and associations has been developed and will continue to be expanded. The HST project team will be engaging these representatives and groups through the following means:

- Presentations and updates at standing meetings/bodies
- Small group meetings on specific topics of interest
- Newsletters, media outreach, "speaker bureau" presentations

Property Owners

Property owners will be informed and engaged in the process through multiple means similar to other stakeholders and members of the public.

Media Coordination

Media coordination will consist of establishing and maintaining a media database of key contacts, connecting with those contacts at key milestones through media advisories and press releases. Where appropriate, briefings on key milestones and important topics will be provided with media contacts. At all times, the team will be available to the media to answer questions and provide project information.

Public Meetings

Public meetings will be conducted at milestone points, anticipated to be:

- Scoping (meetings in San Jose, Gilroy and Merced)
- Alternatives analysis (anticipate meetings in multiple locations)
- Station design and concepts (in Gilroy; anticipate San Francisco to San Jose team will coordinate meetings in San Jose for Diridon station)
- Draft EIR/EIS (anticipate multiple locations)

Core Communication Materials

Below are core communication materials and tools planned to help inform and involve people during the environmental review.

Mailing List. A comprehensive mailing list was developed before scoping and will be updated throughout the study and used to distribute meeting and milestones notices such as release of the NOI/NOP, scoping meetings, release of the draft EIR/EIS and associated public hearings. The list also will be used to widely distribute newsletters and other periodic updates. It will include e-mails for all who provide them, as well as information on whether a person attended a public workshop, submitted comments, or otherwise participated in the process. The list includes:

- Federal, state, regional and local agency staff and elected officials in or with jurisdiction over the communities along/near proposed route alignments.
- Environmental, historic preservation, agricultural, business, general community/neighborhood interest groups and associations in/near communities adjacent to/near proposed route alignments.
- Regional, local, neighborhood-level print, broadcast, and social media in communities adjacent to/near the proposed route.
- Property owners adjacent to proposed route alignments and within 500 feet of proposed stations.
- All people who sign-in at HSR meetings and workshops, call the information line, e-mail or submit scoping comments and comments on the draft EIS/EIR

Comment Tracking System. Public comments provided during scoping and on the draft EIR/EIS will be formally documented, organized, and categorized by the main and sub-topic area to which they pertain for ease of review and consideration by the environmental team. A detailed report summarizing public input provided during scoping has been prepared and will be posted on the Authority web site and made available to anyone who requests a copy. Between scoping and public release of the draft EIR/EIS, public input provided at meetings, by phone, or e-mail also will be collected, tracked and considered by the HST project team.

Fact Sheets and Newsletters. A fact sheet in English and Spanish was prepared and will be updated, as needed, during the study. Print and electronic newsletters will be prepared and widely distributed to the entire contact list at milestone points to help update people on recent activities, current status and next steps. It is anticipated that the team will prepare these following the Technical Working Group meetings and they will focus on similar themes. For example the first edition will highlight input heard during scoping and will announce the availability of the scoping report. The next will explain the alternatives analysis process and potential new alternatives under consideration. Newsletters will be in English and Spanish with information on how to request versions in Chinese and Vietnamese.

Meeting Notices. Print and e-mail notice and newspaper advertisements will be prepared to help notice release of major documents and formal HSR-organized public meetings. The first notice of the release of the NOI/NOP and scoping meetings was in English with information in Spanish, Chinese and Vietnamese directing those speakers to a phone number to call to request information in those languages. Future notices will be in both English and Spanish with information on how to request information in Chinese and Vietnamese.

Web Site. All publicly available documents will be posted on the Authority web site at www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov, including updates and notices of important milestones and meetings.

Information Line. An information line has been set up and will be maintained throughout the environmental process that allows callers to leave messages that project team members will log, track and respond to. Messages left in languages other than English will be translated and responded to in the appropriate language.

Media. Notice of milestone meetings and events will be provided to local and regional media, including social and neighborhood media sites. The San Jose to Merced team will coordinate closely with the San Francisco to San Jose and Bakersfield to Merced teams to brief reporters and editors and proactively provide background information to help encourage balanced and accurate coverage.